

SSUNI FEMINIST SOCIETY

Prepared by: Ellen Taylor SSUNI Community Relations Officer

All responses are unedited and as they appear in the survey results.

### PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

EILIDH O'CONNOR - PRESIDENT



It is my greatest pleasure to present the results of the SSUNI Feminist Society's report on Sexual Harassment within schools in NI. This report is the first of its kind in Northern Ireland and it is our hope that it will go a long way toward tackling the issues of sexism and harassment in schools here. I have seen firsthand the hard work and commitment shown by our Feminist Society who have spent months gathering data and writing this report. I would like to thank everyone who has had a role in the launching of this report. From our member schools and everyone who shared the initial survey, Ellen Taylor who spearheaded the efforts, and all of the young people involved in the SSUNI Feminist Society who have dedicated their time to the group over the last few months. This report is the culmination of a massive team effort and I am proud of each and every one of you. Thank you for taking the time to read this report and we hope the findings will help implement change.

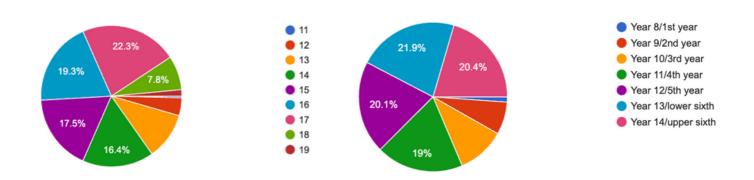
### **OUR JOURNEY**

ELLEN TAYLOR - FOUNDER



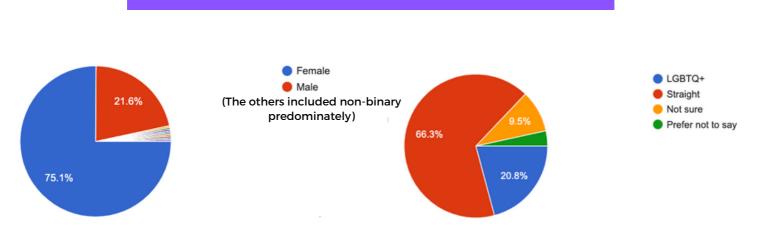
On a whim, I founded the Feminist Society in April 2022, and we received an overwhelmingly positive response. Our first big event was a Feminist Hustings, where we had politicians from all the main parties (aside from the DUP, who didn't respond) questioned by our members on a variety of topics. This was very exciting and a fantastic opportunity for young people. Then, we focused our attention on creating this report as a common theme brought up in meetings and interactions was the lack of NI-specific sexism statistics. We then broke for the summer and published our survey in September, receiving 270 detailed responses. It has taken a lot of time and work to get to this point, especially as a purely student-ran organisation. But we are delighted to finally present this report, despite the results presenting many concerns for politicians and the public. I am so grateful to the amazing work by the Feminist Society, thank you.

### AGE AND SCHOOL YEAR OF THE PARTICIPANTS

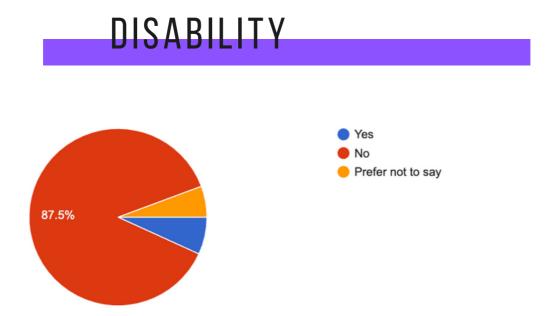


'THE RESULTS SHOW THAT IT IS PRIMARILY SENIOR SCHOOL
CHILDREN (FOR THE MOST PART) WHO UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES OF
SEXISM AND HARASSMENT TAKING PLACE IN THEIR SCHOOLS' ALANA, FEMSOC MEMBER

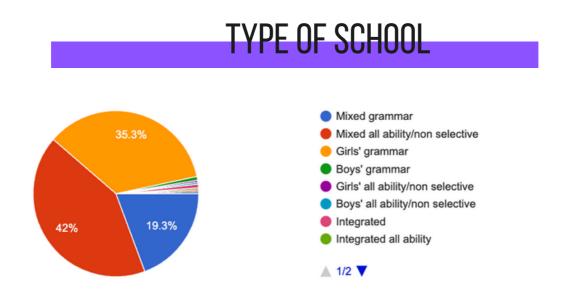
#### GENDER + SEXUALITY



'IT IS CLEAR THAT A LOT OF PARTICIPANTS DEFINE
THEMSELVES AS FEMALE AS, STATISTICALLY, WOMEN FACE
MORE INSTANCES OF SEXISM THAN MEN. HOWEVER, SEEING
A VARIATION OF MEN, WOMEN, AND OTHER GENDERS
SHOWS HOW STRONG AN ISSUE THIS IS FOR EVERYONE.' ALANA, FEMSOC MEMBER



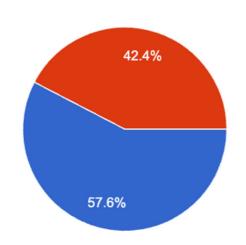
'THIS SHOWS THAT THE MAJORITY OF RESPONSES ARE ABLED RATHER THAN DISABLED THOUGH FEW CHOSE NOT TO ANSWER, POSSIBLY DUE TO THE PERSONAL NATURE OF THE QUESTION.' - ABBIE, FEMSOC MEMBER



'MOST PARTICIPANTS ATTEND A MIXED SCHOOL - 42% ATTENDING A MIXED ALL ABILITY AND 19.3% ATTENDING A MIXED GRAMMAR.' ABBIE, FEMSOC MEMBER

(NOTE - SOME MISUNDERSTOOD THIS QUESTION AS INTEGRATED SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE MIXED ALL ABILITY SECTION)

## HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TREATED DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE OF YOUR GENDER?





'ITS NOT THE PERSON'S FAULT - IT'S THE FAULT OF THOSE WHO MAKE COMMENTS ON THEM NEGATIVELY, AFFECTING WHAT THEY CAN WEAR OR DO' - ANGELIKA, FEMSOC MEMBER

#### WHAT THE STUDENTS SAID...

'WHEN THE OPPOSITE GENDER SAYS YOU CAN'T DO A CERTAIN THING BECAUSE EVERYONE THINKS CERTAIN THINGS ARE FOR CERTAIN GENDERS' - STUDENT

'WE CAN'T WEAR LEGGINGS IN SCHOOL AS GIRLS, BUT WE CAN WEAR SKORTS! WHILST THE BOYS CAN WEAR ANYTHING.' - STUDENT

'MOMENTS OF PASSIVE AGGRESSIVENESS, UNDERESTIMATION AND BEING OVERLOOKED OR STEREOTYPED.' - STUDENT

'UNIFORM ENFORCEMENT. INAPPROPRIATE ANALOGIES ABOUT ME TO TEACH A PART OF A LESSON.' - STUDENT

'BOYS SAY I BELONG IN THE KITCHEN' - STUDENT

'SEXIST COMMENTS, AND BEING TOLD I'M NOT ABLE TO DO OR ACHIEVE CERTAIN THINGS BECAUSE I'M A GIRL' - STUDENT

'NOT GETTING THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES AS BOYS ESPECIALLY IN SPORTS' - STUDENT

'JUST LAST MONTH I WAS HELPING LIFT SMALL
TABLES (YOU COULD LIFT ONE WITH ONE HAND
EASILY) AND A TEACHER STOPPED ME AND SAID
"YOU SHOULD HAVE LET THE BOYS DO THE
HEAVY LIFTING".' - STUDENT

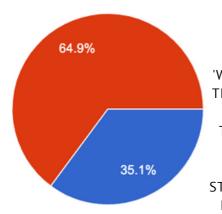
'STUDENTS ALWAYS EXPRESS SEXIST REMARKS
IN CLASS ABOUT WOMEN WHICH ARE NEVER
DEALT WITH SERIOUSLY.' - STUDENT

'NOT ALLOWED TO PLAY FOOTBALL DURING BREAK AND LUNCH BECAUSE I'M A GIRL' -STUDENT

'BEEN TOLD TO NOT WEAR PE SHORTS
AROUND THE SCHOOL, TO NOT DISTRACT
THE MALE TEACHERS.' - STUDENT

'BOYS ARE LOOKED AT AS WORSE BEHAVED IN SCHOOLS' - STUDENT

## DID YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE REPORTING THIS TO A TEACHER?



YesNo

'WITH THE MAJORITY OF STUDENTS ANSWERING NO TO THE QUESTION, IT IS CLEAR THAT STUDENTS DON'T FEEL COMFORTABLE REPORTING INCIDENTS TO A TEACHER. MANY STUDENTS DID NOT FEEL THAT THE INCIDENT WAS SERIOUS ENOUGH TO TELL A TEACHER ABOUT OR THAT IT WOULD BE TREATED SERIOUSLY IF THEY DID REPORT IT. FOR MANY STUDENTS, ANXIETY AND EMBARRASSMENT PREVENTED THEM FROM TELLING A TEACHER ABOUT ANY INCIDENTS THAT HAPPENED.

STUDENTS EXPRESSED FEELING LIKE IT "ALWAYS GETS BRUSHED OFF" AND THAT "IT IS UNLIKELY TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY". SOME STUDENTS FELT THAT SEXISM HAS BEEN NORMALISED IN SCHOOLS.' - IZZY, FEMSOC MEMBER

#### **WHAT THE STUDENTS SAID...**

'WOULDN'T BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY' - STUDENT

'SCHOOL DOESN'T FEEL LIKE A SAFE SPACE.' - STUDENT

'1) BECAUSE I THINK THE TEACHERS DON'T
REALLY SEE A PROBLEM WITH IT 2) I'M
AFRAID THAT A TEACHER WOULD TAKE THEIR
COLLEAGUES SIDE 3) I FEEL LIKE THEY
WOULD ONLY WARN THEM NOT TO DO IT
AGAIN AND IT WOULDN'T REALLY ACTUALLY
SOLVE THE PROBLEM' - STUDENT

'THEY ARE THE ONES THAT CREATED THAT RULE' - STUDENT

'T FELT TOO PERSONAL TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE THAT I AM NOT CLOSE TO' - STUDENT

'THEY DON'T CARE' - STUDENT

'IT IS OFTEN NOT VIEWED AS A 'BIG DEAL',
SOMETHING WHICH HAS LEAD TO ME FEARING
THAT I AM 'JUST BEING DRAMATIC' OR
OVERTHINKING IT. FURTHERMORE, IT IS OFTEN
BRUSHED OFF OR NOT HANDLED AT ALL,
THERFORE, FEELS FUTILE TO REPORT.' STUDENT

'THEY NEVER DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT' -STUDENT

'NOT CLOSE ENOUGH WITH MY TEACHERS.'
- STUDENT

'I'M QUITE ANXIOUS AND I ALSO FEAR THAT THE BOYS WILL FIND OUT AND TREAT US WORSE.' -STUDENT

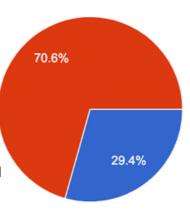
'BECAUSE I FEEL LIKE ILL BE A TELLTALE' - STUDENT 'FELT THAT I WAS TO BLAME. I FELT EMBARRASSED AND THAT I WOULDN'T BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY. I WAS ASHAMED.

DON'T THINK THEY WOULD BE SERIOUS

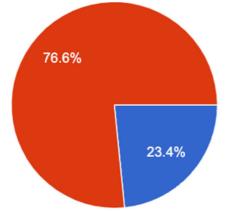
' - STUDENT

### O 7 DO YOU THINK SEXISM AT SCHOOL IS TAKEN SERIOUSLY ENOUGH?

'THE LACK OF EFFECTIVE SUPPORT AND
GUIDANCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, IS NOT ONLY
STRENGTHENING AND INVIGORATING SEXIST
MINDSETS AND IDEOLOGIES BUT LEAVING
YOUNG PEOPLE WITHOUT SUPPORT OR
STRUCTURE TO PROTECT THEM AND HELP THEM
TO PROTECT OTHERS.' - LAUREN, FEMSOC
MEMBER



# ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY SCHOOL RULES/POLICIES THAT SPECIFICALLY Yes No ADDRESS SEXISM?



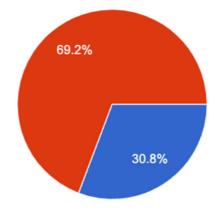
'IT SHOULD BE COMMON SENSE TO TREAT ALL GENDERS EQUALLY. SCHOOLS NEED TO TAKE SEXISM MORE SERIOUSLY AS IT'S AN ISSUE THAT AFFECTS ALL OF US.' - LYDIA, FEMSOC MEMBER

Yes

### IF YES, DO YOU THINK THE RULES AT SCHOOL WORK WELL TO STOP SEXISM AND SEXUAL

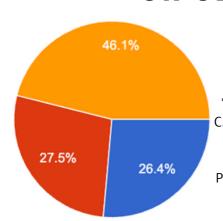
### HARASSMENT?

'DRASTIC REFORM IS REQUIRED TO PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION' -LAUREN, FEMSOC MEMBER



## WOULD YOU FEEL CONFIDENT REPORTING A SEXIST INCIDENT OR SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

No



Maybe
'WITHOUT REPORTING AN INCIDENT OF SEXISM OR SEXUAL HARASSMENT, THERE CAN BE NO ACTION TAKEN TO, FIRST OF ALL, PROTECT AND HELP THE VICTIM AND,

SECOND OF ALL, TO DISCIPLINE THE PERPETRATOR TO -HOPEFULLY- PREVENT REPEATED INCIDENTS. THIS IS WHY THE FACT ONLY AROUND A QUARTER OF PEOPLE SAID THEY WERE FULLY CONFIDENT IN REPORTING THIS BEHAVIOUR IS SO WORRYING.' - MEABH, FEMSOC MEMBER

'THE MOST COMMONLY RECORDED RESPONSES FOLLOWED THE TREND OF THREE PRIMARY THEMES: STUDENTS FELT IT WAS UNSAFE OR TOO SCARY TO REPORT; REPORTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT OR SEXIST INCIDENTS ARE ALL TOO OFTEN BRUSHED OFF; AND, SIMILARLY, IF REPORTED, THEY ARE NOT WELL DEALT WITH, THE STUDENT IS NOT BELIEVED, OR THE STUDENT LACKS SUPPORT (OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY A FEAR OF GETTING IN TROUBLE). THE OTHER RECURRING THEMES WERE THAT IT FEELS TOO TRIVIAL TO REPORT (AND THAT IT IS TOO TABOO AND 'AWKWARD' AN ISSUE, OR, INDEED, TOO NORMALISED, FOR IT TO BE PROPERLY DEALT WITH), THE IDEA THAT FEMALE STUDENTS CANNOT HARASS MALE STUDENTS, THAT STUDENTS FEEL POWERLESS, DO NOT WANT TO BECOME INVOLVED, AND THE NOTION THAT REPORTING THE INCIDENT MAY ONLY WORSEN THE SITUATION.' - MIRRAN, FEMSOC MEMBER

### WHAT THE STUDENTS SAID...

'I WOULD NOT FEEL LIKE I WOULD BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY IF I WERE TO REPORT EVEN SEEMINGLY TRIVIAL THINGS AS I FEEL THEY WOULD BE BRUSHED OFF AS 'BOYS BEING BOYS'.' - STUDENT

'WE ARE MADE TO FEEL AS IF OUR FEELINGS ARE OFTEN INVALID OR AS A RESULT OF PMS' -STUDENT

'I BELIEVE ONLY SEXISM/MISOGYNY BY BOYS IS ADDRESSED.' - STUDENT

'I WOULDN'T BE SAYING IT TO A TEACHER' -STUDENT

'BECAUSE I DON'T WANNA TELL CUS LIKE I DON'T WANNA BE INVOLVED' - STUDENT 'NOTHING SERIOUS WOULD HAVE COME FROM IT, OR IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BRUSHED OFF' -STUDENT

'NOTHING WAS DONE THE FIRST TIME, SO WHAT
IS THE POINT?' - STUDENT

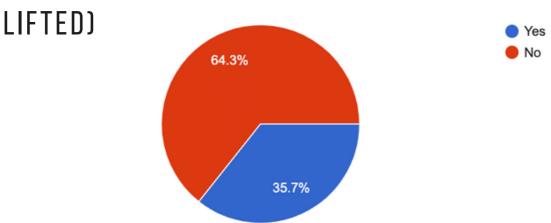
'IF IT WAS A TEACHER BEING SEXIST, I
WOULDN'T FEEL CONFIDENT REPORTING IT!' STUDENT

'I WAS FACED WITH VICTIM BLAMING, PATRONISING EXCUSES FOR THE PERPETRATORS ACTIONS' - STUDENT

'MY SCHOOL DOES NOT FEEL LIKE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT TO SHARE EXPERIENCE' - STUDENT

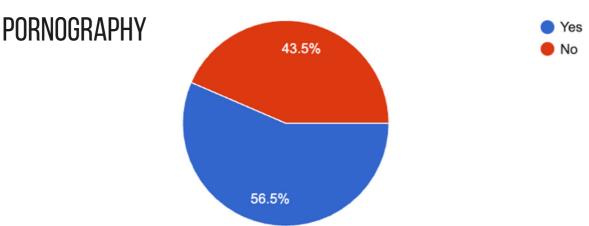
'WOULDN'T BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY' - STUDENT

HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED: UNWANTED PHYSICAL CONTACT OF A SEXUAL NATURE. (FOR EXAMPLE: TOUCHING, KISSING, OR GIRLS HAVING THEIR SKIRTS



'NOBODY SHOULD HAVE TO EXPERIENCE OR WITNESS THIS IN THEIR LIVES, AND IT SHOULD NOT BE TREATED AS SOMETHING CASUAL OR SOMETHING THAT IS 'JUST A LAUGH'. CASES SUCH AS THESE NEED TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AND THE DISCOURSE AROUND THESE ISSUES NEEDS TO CHANGE.' - ABBIE, FEMSOC MEMBER

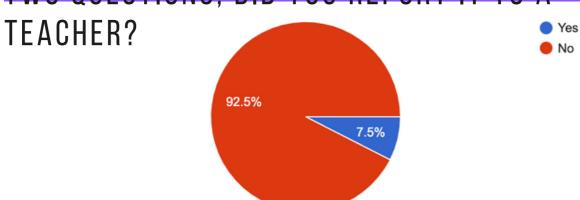
HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED: UNWANTED ATTENTION (NON-PHYSICAL) OF A SEXUAL NATURE. FOR EXAMPLE: WOLF-WHISTLING, SEXUAL COMMENTS, SEXUAL GESTURES, OR BEING SHOWN



'HARMFUL ACTS SUCH AS THESE ARE SO HEAVILY INGRAINED IN OUR SOCIETY, AND THERE NEEDS TO BE AN INCREASED AWARENESS ON THESE NON PHYSICAL ACTS, AS THEY ARE STILL AS VALID AND HARMFUL.' ABBIE, FEMSOC MEMBER

### IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED YES TO EITHER OF THOSE



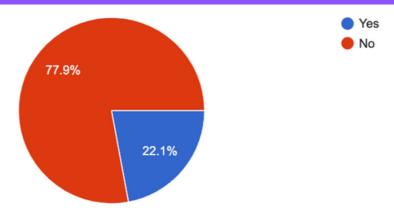


'IN A LOT OF SCHOOLS STUDENTS AREN'T MADE AWARE THAT TEACHERS ARE HERE FOR THIS TYPE OF SUPPORT AND THAT NEEDS TO CHANGE' - ROSEMARY, FEMSOC MEMBER

'I ASKED CLASSMATES WHY THEY MIGHT NOT WANT TO SHARE THESE SORTS OF EXPERIENCES WITH TEACHERS. THE MAIN REASON I GOT FROM THEM WAS DOUBT WITH THEIR TEACHER'S JUDGEMENT. HERE ARE A FEW OF THE RESPONSES: IT NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE SO THE TEACHER WILL DOUBT THEM, THE TEACHER MIGHT NOT UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION AND ACCUSE THEM OF MAKING MINOR ISSUES LARGER THAN THEY NEED TO BE OR TEACHERS NOT BELIEVING YOU DUE TO LACK OF PROOF- ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS, NEED TO SEE TO BELIEVE.'

RACHAEL, FEMSOC MEMBER

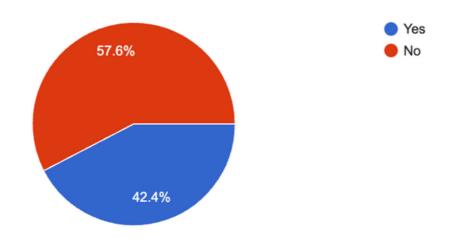
### AND IF YOU DID, WERE YOU HAPPY WITH THE OUTCOME?



'MANY OF THESE ISSUES RESULT IN NO CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PERPETRATOR AND THE SCHOOL TRYING TO DEFEND AND PROTECT THEIR NAME' ROSEMARY, FEMSOC MEMBER

'...SHE ALSO TOLD TEACHERS ABOUT IT WHICH LED FOR HER TO GET CALLED OUT OF CLASS WHICH ALSO JUST NEGATIVELY AFFECTED HER MORE. NOT ONLY PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT HER BUT ALSO DISRUPTED HER LEARNING DUE TO THE TIMING OF THE MEETINGS. IF IT WAS ARRANGED WHEN SHE WAS IN STUDY PERIODS, LESS PEOPLE WOULD HAVE BEEN AWARE, AND SHE DOESN'T HAVE TO STRESS ABOUT CATCHING UP ON WORK. ALTHOUGH I DO UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS NOT ALWAYS POSSIBLE.' RACHAEL, FEMSOC MEMBER

### WOULD YOU FEEL CONFIDENT REPORTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT/ASSAULT?



'42.4% OF RECIPIENTS ANSWERED YES TO THIS QUESTION. WHILE STILL A MINORITY, IT IS A SIGNIFICANT ONE, DEMONSTRATING THAT THERE HAVE BEEN BREAKTHROUGHS IN MESSAGING AROUND THE ISSUE OF REPORTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT/ASSAULT AND MANY ARE NOW FEELING EMPOWERED TO SPEAK OUT. HOWEVER A MAJORITY, 57.6%, WOULD STILL NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE DOING SO. THIS SHOWS HOW BOTH VICTIMS AND POTENTIAL VICTIMS HAVE BEEN LET DOWN BY THE CURRENT CULTURE BY CREATING A CLIMATE OF FEAR OF SPEAKING OUT, PERHAPS BY VICTIM SHAMING OR BY NOT TAKING THE ISSUE SERIOUSLY ENOUGH, NOT ATTRIBUTING ENOUGH OUTRAGE TO THE HARM THIS CAN CAUSE BY LETTING THE ISSUE FESTER.' - RYAN, FEMSOC MEMBER

### STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

1) BOYS SHOULD NOT BE EXCLUDED FROM THIS, BOY ON BOY UNSOLICITED TOUCHING IS DEFINITELY NOT ADDRESSED MUCH. I THINK IT'S BECAUSE IT'S NORMALLY MARKED OFF AS 'NORMAL BANTER'

2) I CAN SEE THAT SEXISM IS A COMMON PROBLEM IN A LOT OF UNWANTED SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR.

3) SOCIAL MEDIA PLAYS A BIG PART IN ENCOURAGING THIS BEHAVIOUR, AND CONTINUING SEXIST IDEOLOGIES. WE SHOULD ADDRESS THIS. ENCOURAGING ONLINE SAFETY GROUPS TO DISCUSS THIS TOPIC WOULD BE ONE WAY TO START!

4) I THINK WHAT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED IS THAT NO SEXUAL HARASSMENT INCIDENT IS A 'MINOR' INCIDENT.

5) SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN CHANGING ROOMS CAME UP QUITE A BIT. I THINK SCHOOLS SHOULD ALLOW THEIR PUPILS TO WEAR THEIR GEAR ON THEIR DESIGNATED PE DAY.

6) THE CONSEQUENCES SHOULD BE THE SAME FOR ALL PUPILS WHO PARTAKE IN THIS BEHAVIOUR, REGARDLESS IF THEY HAVE STAFF RELATIONS IN SCHOOL.

7) CAT-CALLING IS HEAVILY MENTIONED, BY BOTH YOUNGER AND OLDER PUPILS. MY CONCLUSION: AWARENESS AND EDUCATION ON THE SUBJECT SHOULD BE PROVIDED EARLY.

8) TEACHERS WERE ALSO MENTIONED TO PARTAKE IN HARASSMENT BEHAVIOUR. SCHOOL STAFF SHOULD BE AWARE OF THE SUBJECT AND INCIDENTS LIKE THIS SHOULD BE DEALT WITH SERIOUSLY.

9) A LARGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS EXPERIENCED THIS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL, EVEN ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT, WHICH MIGHT INDICATE THAT STUDENTS FEEL IT'S OK TO ACT THAT WAY WHEN THEY ARE NOT AT SCHOOL, AS THEY ARE LESS LIKELY TO FACE REPERCUSSIONS'.

- UGNE, FEMSOC MEMBER

'I THINK IT IS DISGRACEFUL THAT GIRLS EXPERIENCE SEXUAL HARASSMENT AS A RESULT OF JUST LIVING THEIR LIFE, IT'S EVERYWHERE. THE PROBLEM IS RESPECT -PEOPLE HAVE LOST RESPECT FOR OTHERS, ONLY SEEING BODIES AND NOT PEOPLE. SCHOOLS SHOULD BE TRYING TO FOCUS ON PREVENTING IT FROM HAPPENING. SCHOOL IS WHAT TEACHES US MORALS AND WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG; WE'RE TAUGHT ABOUT DRUG ABUSE, PARENTAL ABUSE, AND ALCOHOL ABUSE... BUT WHAT ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE? WHICH IS CURRENTLY BEING RIDICULOUSLY IGNORED, WHY? BECAUSE IT'S AN "AWKWARD TOPIC". THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH.' - TASHA. FEMSOC MEMBER

'EVER SINCE I'VE BEEN QUITE YOUNG I'VE
EXPERIENCED CAT-CALLING, WOLF-WHISTLING
AND OCCASIONALLY GROPING WHEN GOING
INTO A TOWN OR CITY NEAR-BY. I'VE NEVER
DONE ANYTHING TO BRING ON THESE
ACTIONS AND I EVEN DRESS PRETTY
MODESTLY ONLY WEARING JEANS AND TSHIRTS MOST THE TIME. I HAVE CURLY HAIR
AND I'VE OFTEN EXPERIENCED STRANGERS
APPROACHING ME AND TOUCHING IT WITHOUT
MY PERMISSION, THIS HAS OCCASIONALLY
LEFT TO FURTHER TOUCHING. I'VE ALWAYS
BEEN UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THIS BUT FEEL
AS IF I'VE JUST HAD TO LEARN TO DEAL WITH
IT.' - STUDENT

'VERY COMMON IN BOYS LOCKER ROOMS.

UNWANTED/UNSOLICITED TOUCHING OF BODIES
WHEN NOT FULLY CLOTHED. (SLAPPING OTHER
STUDENTS' ASS AS A "JOKE" FOR AN EXAMPLE.)' STUDENT



### **OUR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. Facilitate the reporting of sexism in schools, by making it a reportable offence.
- 2. Add anti-sexism policies to school rules.
- 3. More RSE, in particular, where to go if you experience sexual assault, and what constitutes sexual assault, harassment or rape.
- 4. Training for teachers and youth workers on how to appropriately handle sexism in the classroom and beyond.
- 5. The impact of sexism and misogyny, included in the school curriculum and in RSE, and dealing with and discussing outside negative influences, such as Andrew Tate.

### THANKS:

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO CONTRIBUTED IN ANY WAY, BUT IN PARTICULAR TO:

- NATALIE, LAUREN AND ALL IN NIYF FOR THE USE OF THEIR FACILITIES
- BOTH SSUNI EXECS (21-22 AND 22-23) FOR THEIR HELP
- ALL PAST AND PRESENT MEMBERS OF THE FEMSOC FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS